

# DUCK CREEK

## Golden Anniversary Renovation

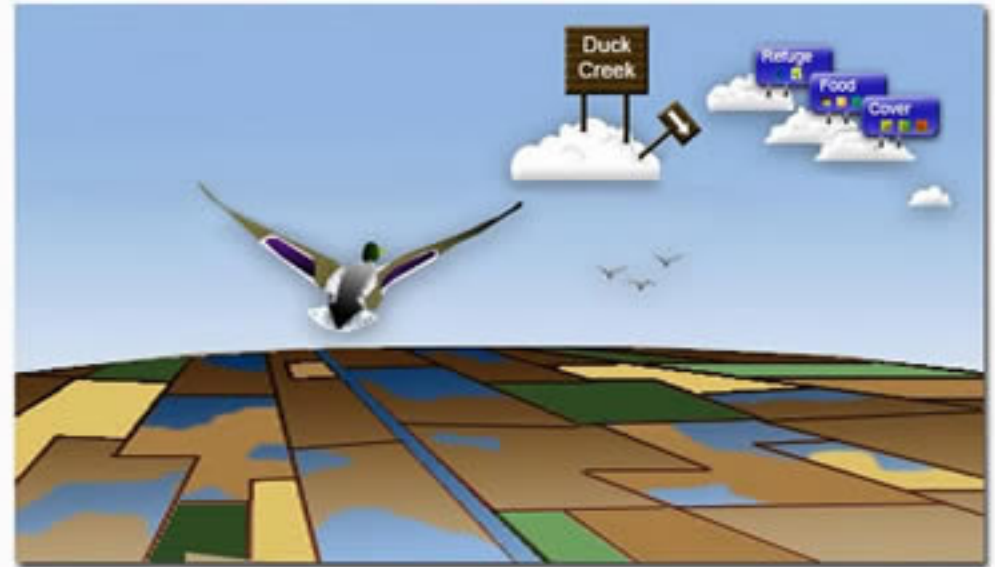
### Cash for Clunkers and Habitat for Honkers

I know it can be frustrating after a long, uneventful day in the field and the only place you see birds stacked on top of each other is in the refuge on your way home. I've been there, believe me, I've been there. But, does the amount of refuge make a difference in the number of ducks or hunting success on an wetland area and is that good or bad?

Well, let's put ourselves in the position of Mr. Mallard. We, like ducks, if given a choice will steer away from pressure. I, myself, hate being pressured into buying something, especially vehicles. That is why I stay away from car lots most of the time. The only time I go is when I absolutely have to buy a car. Only then do I set foot within the boundaries of a car lot. Even here, I minimize my exposure to pressure at first by going after hours so that I'm not harassed. I may hit a couple lots if they are nearby and it won't take too much effort to cross the street or go next door. Depending upon time and urgency, I may go across town to another lot. However, traveling to another city to evaluate any deals may not be worth the effort. When I do see a vehicle and feel like it is worth the cost, I will go back during working hours and try to survive the gauntlet of haggling in hopes to purchase my new set of wheels.

So how does this apply to ducks and refuge? It is well documented that ducks will leave rather quickly if they are heavily disturbed. In the same way I can leave if a salesman is hassling me, ducks can keep on moving south. They don't have to stop and stay in Missouri. As a mid-latitude state, we are mainly used as a pit stop during fall and spring migration. Roosting, feeding, socializing, and cover are all important habitat attributes that waterfowl are searching for during their annual expedition. If these resources aren't available or accessible they will go elsewhere. In areas of heavy hunting, like our conservation areas, refuge is necessary for large concentrations of birds to stop over and build up during migration despite the high level of disturbance. If you didn't have refuge, you wouldn't have ducks on these areas.

Over the last 20 years our wetland management plan calls for each public wetland area larger than 500 acres to have 25-50% set aside for refuge. This may be accomplished by providing a combination of temporal and spatial refuge. Temporal refuge is provided by closing hunting at a particular time or day(s) to allow waterfowl



access to the wetland resources. This is similar to the example of visiting a car dealership after hours. Spatial refuge refers to the location of sanctuary. Research shows that waterfowl benefit from having habitat and refuge in close proximity. Less distance to resources equates to less energy burned up and more time to forage, which at times may outweigh the risk of disturbance. This is similar to when I am ready to commit and buy that vehicle. I'm willing to handle the pressuring salesman in order to get what I need. In a similar instance, ducks utilizing refuges will use hunted areas nearby if it means they can find the right food or cover that they require.

So this is our idea of how the world works, but is that what really happens? Do birds really respond to refuge and does it affect hunting success? We analyzed some data to see what the relationship was between our refuges, waterfowl numbers and area hunter success. Our analysis showed that there is a positive relationship between the current amount of refuge (spatial and temporal) and the number of ducks and hunter success in Missouri. Areas with a larger amount of refuge had greater number of birds and higher hunter success. So the next question may be, "Is refuge limiting hunting success outside of our areas?". Harvest data shows that 85% of the total waterfowl harvest is not on MDC managed wetlands. It appears that there are plenty of hunters that are able to bag birds and are not limited by our refuge system.

Hopefully, I've been able to illustrate with a cheesy analogy, some rationale, and research why refuge is important and in fact helpful for hunters on our public areas. Good luck on your next hunting trip. I hope the weather cooperates for you and that it is a quality hunt.



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